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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000186

SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [RP](#)  
SUBJECT: SECOND ULAMA CONFERENCE REACHES OUT TO PRESIDENT  
OBAMA

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: At the Philippines' second-ever Ulama Conference, conference organizers provided an open letter to President Obama in which they expressed their heartfelt appreciation for his effort to reach out to them -- even as early as in his inaugural address, and their desire to strengthen ties of friendship with the people of the United States. (The letter's full text follows below.) Remarks by Ambassador to the group were warmly welcomed by over 200 Muslim scholars assembled from the southern Philippines and elsewhere. The Ambassador underscored U.S. respect for Islam, and noted that the new U.S. administration wants to build bridges to, and open dialogue with, the Muslim community at large. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The stated purpose of this second Ulama Conference in the Philippines, a four-day event in Quezon City attended by more than 200 Muslim leaders (including women) from Mindanao and elsewhere in the Philippines, was to help the ulama organize a national umbrella organization of Muslim religious leaders. Thirty aleemat (Muslim women religious scholars) joined the gathering to discuss their proposals for organizing the Muslim community. During this second national summit, the ulama sought to ratify the charter for their organization and elect their governing board. They hoped the conference would be successful in establishing a network with the potential to be a major vehicle for peace and development work, similar to the Christian religious network.

¶3. (U) Conference organizers presented the Ambassador with an open letter to President Obama (text provided below). The letter notes the President's inaugural address and quotes a "new way forward, based on mutual respect and mutual interest." It asks that the President address six aims ranging from engaging the Muslim world to extending relief to displaced people in Mindanao. Following her remarks, the Ambassador offered a brief television interview in which she reiterated President Obama's respect for Islam, and his desire to listen to what the rest of the world has to say.

¶4. (U) The Ambassador's remarks focused on the respect that the U.S. has for Muslims. She pointed out the background of President Obama, and that his first interview with an international press organization was with Al Arabiya (a comment that received strong applause from the audience). She emphasized that the President truly wants to hear the concerns of the Muslim world, and pointed out how much she has learned from the Muslim people during her many trips to Mindanao. She congratulated the conference participants on their taking the initiative to work together for peace and development, and expressed the sincere wish of the USG that Mindanao achieves the peace and prosperity that it so richly deserves.

COMMENT

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¶5. (SBU) The gathering of more than 200 Muslim spiritual leaders from throughout the region presented a rare opportunity for the Ambassador to address -- and more importantly, listen to the concerns of -- a group that has sometimes felt marginalized in Philippine society. While Mission officials invariably receive a warm welcome from generally friendly Muslim communities in the Philippines, the Ambassador's mention of President Obama's message of respect for the Muslim world garnered an exceptionally enthusiastic response, clearly reflecting the goodwill they feel toward the President. Their letter to President Obama is very positive. Most, if not all, of their requests for the United States reflect efforts already underway.

¶6. (U) Begin text of letter:

2nd NATIONAL SUMMIT OF ULAMA IN THE PHILIPPINES  
Quezon City, Philippines  
January 26 to 29, 2009

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA

January 29, 2009

HIS EXCELLENCY  
PRESIDENT BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA  
Washington, D.C.  
United States of American

Dear Mr. President:

Greetings of peace and goodwill.

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We, the undersigned participants to the 2nd National Ulama Summit in the Philippines, held on January 26 to 29, 2009 at the Imperial Palace Suites, Quezon City, Philippines, send our heartfelt congratulations and felicitations to Your Excellency for having been sworn into office as the first American President with personal ties to the Islamic world, Asia and Africa.

We take note of Your Excellency's inaugural address on January 20, 2009. We express our deep appreciation for your statement assuring the Muslim world of a "new way forward, based on mutual respect and mutual interest." We also take note with interest of Your Excellency's description of America as "a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity." And so in the spirit of your recent pronouncement that "America will start by listening, not dictating," the Muslims in the Philippines, with equal vigor and commitment to peace and the dignity of humanity, hereby reach out across the ocean to take outstretched hand and seek to renew and strengthen our friendship with America and the American people.

On this momentous occasion, we make the following appeal to Your Excellency, with goodwill and universal peace as our primary aim:

¶1. To engage the Muslim world, particularly the ulama sector, through dialogue and cooperation that will benefit our communities and humanity;

¶2. To address the root cause of the problem in the Middle East by recognizing the right of the Palestinians to their homeland and a state of their own;

¶3. To vigorously support the peace process in Mindanao to end the 40-year armed conflict which has resulted in 600,000 displaced and hundreds killed since August 2008, and work to bring the Government of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) back to the negotiating table as soon as possible;

¶4. To support the legitimate and inherent right of the Bangsamoro people to self-determination;

¶5. To support the full implementation of the 1996 Final Peace Agreement between the Moro National Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine government; and

¶6. To extend massive relief and rehabilitation assistance to internally displaced persons in Mindanao, particularly in conflict-affected areas, through socio-economic development programs that will bring prosperity and dignity to our people.

In conclusion, we heard you loud and clear when you told the Muslim world: "Americans are not your enemy." Mr. President, with respect and a conviction to improve relations between Muslims and the West, we also say to you, "the Muslims are not your enemy."

We reiterate our felicitations and congratulations to Your Excellency. Please accept our highest regard and good wishes to the First Family and to the American people.

Thank you, Mr. President, and Godspeed.

Sincerely,

(SIGNATORIES)  
KENNEY